



# Skull and Saltire

*Jim Hewitson*

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Pirates! The word is enough to send a shiver through your timbers. A nation such as the Scots, with its seafaring tradition, inevitably has a history of lawlessness at sea. From the earliest times, shrewd sailors realised that, by branching out as government agents, privateers or freelance plunderers, they could make more than just a living. Nautical Scots played a part in the Golden Age of Piracy, in the seventeenth century, most notably in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. But the story of Scottish piracy probably stretches back to Roman times and reaches up to the present day. In this exploration of a little-known aspect of Scottish seafaring, Jim Hewitson hauls up the anchor, hoists the Jolly Roger and takes us into some unexpected waters to meet characters such as: Kirkcudbright-born John Paul Jones, founder of the US navy, hero to the Americans, rogue pirate to the British; Sweyn Asleifsson, an Orkney-based pirate who spent half the year as a peaceful farmer and the other as a wild sea raider; and Greenock's Captain Kidd, the notorious piratical stereotype, who turns out to be more of a naive fall guy than a swashbuckling adventurer.

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